

VZCZCXRO7859  
OO RUEHPB RUEHPT  
DE RUEHBY #0952 2960637  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 230637Z OCT 09  
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2173  
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 9623  
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA 5549  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 2053  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3716  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0146  
RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE 6725  
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 4991  
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 4988  
RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS CANBERRA 000952

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/IHB, AIAG FOR WINN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [AS](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRALIA H1N1 RESPONSE: LOWERING THE HEAT

REF: A. CANBERRA 907

[1](#)B. CANBERRA 812

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Australia is slowly decreasing its H1N1 alert level as flu season ends. Despite a few minor shortcomings with its national vaccine program (ref A), the GOA is confident that the current situation is stable and is reducing resources committed to managing H1N1. Based on this year's experiences, plans are underway to revise pandemic planning. The Department of Health and Ageing is carefully monitoring Northern Hemisphere epidemiological data to assess whether pandemic influenza will emerge in any threatening form this season. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Econoff met with Gary Lum, Assistant Secretary for Emergency Health Management at the Department of Health and Ageing (DOHA) on October 13. Lum has headed the Department's National Incident Room throughout the early and middle stages of the H1N1 pandemic. He told Econoff that Australia's state and federal health experts were "plussed-up" for the recent rollout of the national vaccine plan, but as flu season was over in Australia, the GOA is planning to roll back the level of resources committed against H1N1 by mid-summer. Lum said that would include folding H1N1 surveillance back into regular epidemic surveillance. Australia has confirmed more than 36,000 cases of H1N1 since March, with 185 deaths. The GOA has procured enough H1N1 vaccine to vaccinate all Australians, although vaccination is only recommended, not mandatory.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Lum said one reason why DOHA was lowering its guard was that Australia was getting extremely good epidemiological data from U.S. and other Northern Hemisphere sources, and are watching that carefully to try and see what events develop over the upcoming flu season. This should provide early warning for Australia even with surveillance folded back into the routine influenza surveillance system. At the same time, Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer Jim Bishop told parliamentarians at DOHA Senate Estimates on October 22 that the government should not become complacent about H1N1 and that a new round of infection could enter Australia over the summer.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Lum said there were a few minor problems with the rollout of the vaccine plan (ref A), specifically a number of allergic reactions to the latex used in the kits and the rapid response by a small, vocal anti-vaccination lobby in Australia. Despite those issues, Lum said that government was pleased with the progress of the vaccine program, and expected human trials on subjects under 9 years of age to

begin in mid-November.

¶5. (SBU) DOHA is revising the Australian Health Management of Pandemic Influenza (AHMPPI) over the next few months, and incorporating lessons learned that will then enable the Prime Minister and his staff to revise the overall National Action Plan on emergency response to better deal with a potential second wave of pandemic influenza.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Lum's view was that all these measures, along with the relatively low pathogenicity of current H1N1 strains, gave him a good degree of confidence that the chances of a higher-mortality "second wave," and subsequent public reaction, were small. But he stressed that such confidence has been proven wrong in the past. A massive second outbreak in the Northern Hemisphere in the next few weeks would likely reduce the time Australia has to prepare itself against a possible reemergence of H1N1. End Comment.

CLUNE